

Turning Tables

by shootingstarsandjaybirds

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Summary: Zane relies on the comfort of his Dad's bank account, while Rikki ignores her clingy ex-boyfriend. Suddenly the tables are turned when Rikki wins the lottery and Zane's Dad loses it all. Meanwhile - Lewis is sick, Cleo's secret is at risk, and a familiar face is back to torture. Whose funeral needs preparation and how far will they go to save the ones they love? Set after Season 3.

1. Prologue

In Rikki's mind, Zane wouldn't know what hit him if he was living her life-lack of money, unable to pay expenses. And Zane believes Rikki wouldn't be able to handle the toll that fortune takes on a person. What would happen if the tables turned? When Rikki's Dad wins the lottery, and Zane's Father loses it all in the stock market, actions begin to speak louder than words. Cleo and Lewis are inseparable. Until something is wrong with Lewis._

****Hey, I thought this was a cute idea and this is just a prologue. This story is mostly Zikki, but Clewis as well. I love hearing your opinion and value what you think greatly! Tell me if I should continue! Thanks!****

Zane was slouched across his father's couch - his overly expensive extravagant leather couch - that they barely got any use out of, eating a slice of pizza from the delivery box. Summer break had been one big blur for Zane - late night deliveries and the compelling urge to resist any thoughts that might cause him to think. He preferred watching late night movies On Demand and ordering out whenever he felt hungry. Pizza, chicken, Chinese, whatever he was in the mood for.

He didn't know whether it was comfort food, or just food. But considering he didn't feel like thinking, or doing anything for that matter, he simply watched one of the purely worst acted films he'd ever seen, without questioning his motives. He was running on

instinct.

His thoughts were a nuisance to him now. They brought up many happy memories, but with any form of happiness for Zane, came the sadness and regrets.

His phone rang across the room, but he didn't bother to answer it - until he pondered who it might be. Zane shot up off the couch, spilling the pizza in the process, and snapped it open on the fourth ring, not bothering to check who it was. His thoughts had got him this far - now it was his instincts turn.

"Rikki?" He breathed with a sigh, being the first to talk.

In response was a nasally, prissy offended tone, a female voice he knew all too well. "What was that? Zane?" She flirted, obviously not hearing him. "Well, anyways. My Dad was totally talking to your Dad. And he's in some Latin American country, likeâ€¦Europe, right?" Zane could almost picture her twirling her hair. "That's so cool. But whatever. They said we should hang out, and I totally agree. Maybe I'll get a cute little heart tattoo on my ankle?" She giggled.

"Miriam," he pinched the bridge of his nose and rolled his eyes, glad she couldn't see him. "I don't know if I can."

"Tomorrow? Come on," she giggled again, her laugh piercing through the line and causing him to remove the phone from his ear by a few inches. "I'll make it say _Zane_! Ooh!" She continued.

"Don't tattoo my name on your body," he wanted to hang up. But if Harrison had anything to do with this, then he was prone to find out and Zane didn't like the sound of that. He could cut off Zane's allowance or take away his boat. And Zane liked his freedom.

"Ok. I know you want what's best for me," she paused. "Mall tomorrow! Ooh, we can shop for hair stuff. I'm sure your in need of a girl's opinion," she mused. "Let's say eleven? Meet you by fountain," Miriam's shrill voice rebounded off the chambers of Zane's head. "Whatever." He hung up. Maybe she'd forget, or better yet, maybe she'd give up on him coming and ignore him for the rest of his life.

Zane sat back down on the couch, and did something he'd wanted to do for a long time. He dialed the familiar number he'd come to memorize. One ring. Two rings. Voicemail.

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Rikki's hair was being brushed by Bella as Cleo pondered which hair gel to use.

"The blue or the pink?" Cleo called from the bathroom.

Rikki laughed. "When's the last time you used those?" She responded for Bella. "Let me see them. Ouch," she repositioned the brush in her hair and let Bella do her thing.

Cleo brought the products over and sheepishly grinned. "They're really old. I found them in the back of my sink cabinet. Here," she

tossed them to Rikki.

Rikki mused at the label. "Sixty percent water?" She raised an eyebrow at Cleo.

Bella laughed from behind her. "Hey, Rikki your phone's ringing," Bella tossed it to her.

Rikki's eyes widened at the caller I.D, and before she could think, she flipped her phone shut, sending Zane to voicemail.

"Who was that?" Cleo asked empty-mindedly.

Rikki was half frozen on the bed in a stance that suggested anxiety. The play of emotions that flashed across her face was unreadable and confusing to say the least. Bella had stopped brushing Rikki's hair when she became motionless, and Cleo stopped digging through her drawers when there was no answer.

"Oh. Was it Zane?" Bella guessed. The lack of response from Rikki proved her answer right. Bella assumed Rikki was in a trance because she was deep in thought or thinking about Zane or something she'd remembered, as was true. Rikki didn't know what hit her then. It wasn't a full moon or any special magical occasion. Something simply occurred to her and she was dying to know what that ache in her heart had to do with anything. It was obviously some force on Mako making her heart feel this way. Seriously, hearts couldn't hurt, could they? It felt like magic, the way her pulse increased and a quantity of adrenaline conquered her veins, and there couldn't possibly be another explanation for it. All Rikki knew was that she was a mermaid and magic had a lot to do with her life at the moment - there was one place that would cure her. One place that would reset the gears in her system and make Rikki become Rikki again.

"I'm going to Mako," she stood up, an empty look in her eye, and ran out of the room. Rikki needed to think.

Bella and Cleo exchanged a glance.

"Should we follow her?" Cleo asked. "Thatâ€|wasn't Rikki."

Bella shrugged. "If she doesn't come back later, I'd be worried," she scrolled through Rikki's missed calls. "It was Zane. Is something going on with them?" Bella wondered, shaking her head as she thought.

The two jumped as Rikki's phone rang again. "Should I answer it?" Bella smiled. "Let's see what Zane wants, please?" Bella gave Cleo the puppy dog eyes.

"Hello, Rikki's phone, Bella speaking," Bella laughed at Cleo's shocked expression. She clicked the device to speakerphone.

"Hi, is Rikki there?" Zane asked hopefully. "No she's at Mako- Um, she's busy. Sorry," Bella suddenly wanted to hang up. It wasn't like Zane to call or Rikki not to answer her phone in the evening. The sun had set and the moon was up as Bella stared at it through the window.

"Mako?" Zane retorted.

"Oh no," Cleo mouthed.

"No actually, I don't know where she is," Bella lied unsuccessfully.

"But you have her phone. I actually have to go," the voice on the other end seemed thoughtful. The line went dead.

"Bella!" Cleo yelled.

Cleo was furious Bella answered Rikki's phone in the first place. It was Rikki's property and Bella had no right! But to be honest, Cleo didn't care if she answered. She wouldn't care if Bella or Rikki answered her phone, because she trusted them. And she was sure Rikki trusted them, but wasn't Bella out of line? Cleo thought about it. It was Rikki's ex for crying out loud! And on top of that, it was Zane. The mischievous backstabbing cheating weasel that kissed Sophie and betrayed their best friend.

"How could you answer!" Cleo yelled rhetorically.

"I thought I could get him to ease up," Bella was on the same page. It was apparent in her features that she was sorry. Obviously Bella would never intentionally hurt Rikki in any way - they all had one thing that bound them together. Mermaids and their magic.

Lewis suddenly emerged from the hallway. "What's the problem?" He asked, right on cue.

Cleo was upset but couldn't help but laugh. "Lewis, what are you doing here?"

He walked over in a stride of confidence - something rarely portrayed on Lewis's features. He took Cleo's face in his hands and kissed her hard on the lips, breathing heavily. "Cleo, I love you."

"I know that," she rewarded him with a dazzling smile. "I love you too. Why? Is something wrong?" She frowned, forgetting about Zane.

Lewis was out of breath, face red, and stunned. "Wellâ€¦I was talking to your Dad-"

Bella cut Lewis off, an uncontrollable smile plastered on her face. Her sarcastic response was on the mark. "You're not going to ask her to marry you, are you?" She laughed.

The pair turned agitated at her, then made shy eye contact. Cleo's mouth hung open. "Are you?"

His response came at a now or never moment, and when he dropped to one knee, Cleo was sure of it. Bella giggled and jumped up, clasping her hands together and exited the room, secretly watching from the crack in the door she'd pried open.

But Lewis didn't propose. And if he did, Cleo wouldn't of known it. Instead one knee turned to two, and Lewis crumpled to the ground in a heap.

Bella burst through the door, gasping. "Mr. Satori! Kim, Sam!" She called, panicking. A tear slipped down Cleo's cheek. What had just happened? Cleo maneuvered Lewis's body so that it was leaning against the bed. But his eyes were still closed and his mouth was hanging wide open. What had just happened?

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Zane was grinning like an idiot as he snapped his phone shut. He would've been amply pleased if Rikki had answered, and Bella answering had just told him what he needed to do. Acting on impulse, not thoughts.

He needed to go to Mako and find Rikki. He needed to make things right, but he didn't know why. All of the non-thinking exercise had gifted him human instinct. And it was telling him, by all means, find her.

****Hey! I hoped you guys liked the prologue. Short I know, sorry. My chapters are usually a lot longer than this, but I wanted to bounce the idea off everybody. Tell me what you think! The summary says it all. That and that Cleo and Lewis are inseparable, until something goes terribly wrong. Reviews mean the world. Thanks!****

2. Confusion

READ:**** This chapter has been rewritten. The plot will ultimately change (I've got BIG plans!) Your reviews on this chapter before it changed still mean a lot, thank you!**

Cleo was sulking, Bella was shocked, and Don and Sam couldn't arrive to the scene fast enough.

"Cleo?" Sam hurried to encircle her step daughter in her arms. Then she noticed Lewis, and pointed questioningly as Bella led Don to the unconscious boy.

"Weâ€|" Cleo sniffed. "We were joking around. I don't know if I said somethingâ€|" She started to blame herself.

Don sighed, helping Lewis up onto the bed and rubbing Cleo's shoulder. "Sam, call Lewis's parents and an ambulance," he stated quickly.

Sam rushed out of the room.

"Bella, you might want to hear this," he sat and faced the two girls like it was story time on the kindergarten rugs.

Cleo remembered:

I noticed him slightly when he was laughing so hard at the lame joke the teacher had told the class. And especially when he fell out of his chair from craning his neck to read the problem. But he wouldn't of known the answer, anyways. Only one hand shot up, and it was mine.

_It was a simple blonde haired mess of a child that had stolen her white carpet square. I didn't know where the magic swatches of fuzzy

fabric originated from, who did? But he was on mine, and I was about to politely ask him to move when I noticed something in his arms._

"_What's that?" My eyes grew wide._

He turned to me with those stunning blue eyes, even for a child they didn't fail to impress. The boy had a plaid pale shirt and khakis, and tennis shoes that fitted his large feet. I wondered how he could walk with them.

He seemed to eye my billowing dress and simple parted braids my favorite woman in the world - Mommy - had done up for me in a rush to the bus stop.

He shook himself out of the daze. He seemed oblivious to the way our kindergarten society seemed to work - where staring someone up and down was considered rude. Maybe I'd have to teach him what was right. A guy of mystery like that needed a friend, did he not?

He held the lego creation out to me.

"_What's that?" I wondered aloud._

"_I made a tower," he grinned. "And I'm Lewis."_

"_Cleo," I smiled. He couldn't help but stare._

Such simple conversation, a blessed memory that she chose to reveal in her mind. Like draping away the heavy red curtains and cranking up the hand turned movie projection, it played out before her eyes.

That had been the first time she'd ever met Lewis - small innocent, ignorant as children can be. A happy friendship had grown into a relationship, with a simple bump in the road, and now they'd admitted their love. Since Lewis had returned, they were inseparable, always smiling in the presence of one another. Cleo didn't want that all to go away.

Her heart had skipped a beat at the joke of proposal, but maybe she'd been too rough. What if he really was proposing? Did she feint? Obviously, there was something wrong with that scenario, seeing as Bella was in the room. Or at least, watching through the door.

"Cleo," Don stated sternly. "This is a serious matter," he fidgeted his hands. "I need you to listen. Lewis...came to talk to me about this. I assumed he would tell you, and whether he has or not, well, here it goes," he drew in a shaking breath.

Bella inched closer to better read his facial expressions. Cleo just wondered, and blamed everything bad about Lewis on herself, as usual.

"I'm very honored Lewis came to me," Don looked as if he were about to cry. "Look, Cleo," he avoided the subject. "You and Lewis are in love, correct? I know you two are happy about everything. In your relationship-"

"Dad, what is it?" Cleo's voice raised a few octaves.

"Lewis is sick, Cleo."

The tears began to flow like a waterfall of her grief. "Dad no," she cried. "Whatâ€¦what is it?"

"He didn't tell me much," Don was quiet, seeing his daughter in tears. He suddenly regretted all the times he'd gone out of his way to ensure Lewis wasn't spending time with Cleo. He regretted every time Lewis and her weren't together, or whenever his glare leaked signs of his disapproval. If Lewis left, Cleo would never be the same.

"Is it serious?" Bella was subtly sniffing. She hadn't known Lewis that long, but he was like a brother to her.

Don nodded, water escaping his eyes against his will.

There was a flash of light outside, but the world was blurred through foggy eyes and unclear minds. Kim led two men in uniform up the stairs, and to Cleo's room. She pointed. The men asked who wanted a ride. Only one hand shot up.

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Rikki lounged in the moonpool, surrounded by a blanket of blue. Trying this new thing where she didn't lie to herself, unlocked this whole new room in her mind she was unaware was there. She was literally an adult. So why did thinking about Zane still make her heart ache like it did a young teenager. Why was he the first thing that came to mind when she thought about not lying to herself.

She asked a simple question. Do you still have feeling for that ugly son of a- Wait do I? Irrelevant. What? I take that back. He's not ugly. . .he's the most adorable sexy wonderful God of a boyfriend that- STOP. Wrong answer. He's not your boyfriend. You dumped that lowlife little cheating -_

Ok Wait. Enough. Obviously the honesty thing would be harder than she thought. Well, at least she would be honest with herself about everything, and justâ€¦not address that. But the thoughts kept creeping back. Being a mermaid she could always relax, just set her mind free. But tonight she just couldn't get Zane off her mind. New_ Question. If he walked in right now, you wouldn't care, would you? No. _

The answer seemed pretty honesty, yet, when did Rikki ever tell the truth? Maybe it was the fate of Mako that was teaching her a lesson - or maybe, it was Bella's slip up and Cleo's agony that would ultimately lead to the footsteps on the other side of the wall.

Zane came crashing down the land entrance to the Moonpool and ran around. "Rikki," he said in satisfactory.

Her face twisted into a grimace.

"What are you doing here?" She snapped.

He paced a few steps and kneeled by the entrance of the moonpool.

Wasn't it ironic, money was the only thing that could keep him chasing Rikki, and by that, the only thing that gave him a remote chance of getting her back. Yet. . . Money was the same thing that had torn them apart, and on that balcony where they'd developed a liking for each other, what brought them together. What would he do without itâ€¦with no chance of ever winning her heart back again?

"I wanted to see you."

"Are you _stalking_ me!" It was a suggestion. "You followed me after out of the blue, _calling_-"

"Why didn't you answer?" His voice was diminished.

"I didn't _want_ to talk to you."

"If you don't care about me enough to talk, why are you hereâ€¦?" He teased.

"How did you _know_ I was here! Honestly Zane, this charade is getting old. Stop _chasing_ _me around _like we're little kids! I wouldn't want to get a restraining order on you, would I?" She backed up in the pool and threatened to go under.

"Rikki, come on!" He brushed off what she'd said.

"Chasing your ex-girlfriend around? You're a pathetic little rich boy with nothing to your name except money and a history of being jackasses."

She dove under, letting him wallow in her words. Had the person who so defiantly stood up to her Dad when they first were together now just accused him of being just as bad as him? Zane swore long ago he'd never ever be the cruel demon his father was. He'd never argue over money to his wife or girlfriend.

He stopped breathing for a split second.

Wasn't that _exactly_ _why he and Rikki broke up. He was just as bad as his Dad. Zane cringed. He had chosen the importance of money and the business over what mattered the most. Up until the breaking point. Rikki was spot on, and at that, maybe might be what hurt him the most.

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Thanks for suffering through me completely rearranging the chapters and ultimately the plot. Tell me what you think, and no more changes to the existing chapters, I promise!

3. Dedication

**READ: ****Chapter two has been completely rewritten, therefore the plot will change dramatically! Re-read! Sorry for the confusion.**

It'd been an hour and Cleo had long since forgotten about Rikki's disappearance, the weird phone call from Zane, the trip to the hospital, or the way Sam and Don told her the news. All she could

picture and all she could imagine was Lewis lying on a hospital bed, unconscious and lined up with many others to board a train that would never return.

She could only picture a desolate advance of dry, blackened ashy desert without him by her side. Her future would be bleak and painted in shades of black and white. It was too much to hope for shades of gray.

Of course, she knew none of this for certain. That last she'd seen Lewis was forty-five agonizing minutes ago when she'd been herded to the waiting room, and Lewis on a gurney to an unknown section of the big white building.

Cleo had sat down with empty eyes that had been drained of tears. Maybe this was all a dream. Scratch that - a very terrible nightmare she'd soon wake up from. Yes, that had to be it. Because without Lewis, she was only half herself. Only half alive.

Cleo drummed her fingers along the plastic with a wood design, anticipating the doctor's results. She had to know. She couldn't stand it much longer.

After an hour and fifteen minutes of waiting, someone opened the door and called her name. Cleo snapped to attention only to realize it was Bella and her family.

"Can I have ten dollars?" Kim whined.

"Why?" Don was exasperated.

"I'm thirsty!" Kim complained.

"Drinks don't cost ten dollars-" Don began, but was interrupted by a gentle hand on his arm. Sam motioned to Cleo across the room, tear stained and broken.

"Cleo?" Don rushed to her side and took her in his arms.

Bella was right behind him. "I called Rikki," Bella smiled. "She should be here soon. You'll never believe what happened," Bella suggested sympathetically, attempting to cheer her up.

"Sorry about the wait, Cleo," Sam knelt down and took her hands. "Stuck in traffic," she smiled a smile that suggested she thought _Of all the times._

"Thanks for coming," Cleo's voice was choked. She was about to add more to gift her gratitude, but couldn't manage.

Kim stood a few paces away, tapping her foot. "I don't get why I had to come. I mean-"

"Kim, any friend of Cleo's is a friend of _all_ of ours," Don said sternly, pulling Cleo into his chest.

Cleo bit her lip while more tears began to well in her eyes. Beside Bella, is that what they all thought? That Lewis was nothing more than a friend. Lewis had admitted to her once how he'd taken offense when her Dad had called him a 'great first boyfriend'. He was hinting

that they could be so much more. . .but she didn't push it. Cleo didn't want to think like that. She herself knew Lewis meant much more than anybody could ever imagine, and that's all that mattered at the moment. Lewis was all that mattered to her.

A middle age man with a clean cut appearance briskly made his way through an open hallway. "Is there a Cleo Satori here?" He asked.

Cleo stood up and raised her hand like a school girl who was certain she had the right answer. Cringing at the memory, she put her hand down. She quickly shuffled over to him. "I am."

"Lewis was asking for you," he nodded at the hallway. The man looked exasperated.

"He's awake? He's ok? Can I see him?" The questions began pouring out.

"He's awake, but visiting hours are over. . .but_ honestly_ that boy wouldn't shut up about you," the doctor cleverly avoided her second question. "Come with me," they walked to an elevator and down series of long bright hallways before he knocked quietly on a door.

"Yes?" Came a female response from the other side.

The doctor turn the knob and Cleo pushed past him, straight to Lewis's outstretched arms.

The nurse and doctor nodded at each other and gave the two some privacy.

Cleo nestled her face into his chest. "Are you ok? What happened? What's wrong? Why didn't you tell me?" She attempted with all her might to hold back the tears when she moved to look at him.

"I'm sorry," he sat up and moved over, making room on the bed. She curled up next to him willingly.

"Sorry for what?" A tear fell against her will.

The pain was overwhelming for him, seeing Cleo like this and knowing every ounce of it was his fault. He reached out with his hand and brushed the tear away. He kissed her on the cheek slowly.

A distant memory clouded his vision. Back to the days when he and Cleo were just friends, and when his most desperate wish was for her to like him back. When all he wanted was a kiss from her and he ached to hear three special words out of his mouth. After he was positive he could die happy. He hoped that mermaid magic didn't apply to the past—otherwise his bargain might just come true.

At first Lewis thought they'd be together forever. And he didn't understand then why she broke his heart by breaking up with him. And when he told her he loved her, that might have been the most nervous he'd ever been in his life. He was leaving her.

Every wish he'd made on shooting stars for her to be his had come true. And he'd felt like he'd thrown all that away. He felt that same

way now. The last thing he wanted to do was hurt her. And he was. He couldn't change the fact that he was sick.

"Cleo?" He asked after a while of silence.

She drew in a breath and waited.

"I'm sorry for not telling you," he frowned.

"Why wouldn't you? You passed out! You scared me half to death! What ifâ€¦|what ifâ€¦|"

He put an arm around her. "I just thought thatâ€¦|wellâ€¦|I didn't want you to worry. I was feeling sick and my parents brought me to the doctor. To put it simply I have a sort of tumor in my brain. . ." He cringed. "It interferers with my coordination and thought process and touches briefly on my nervous system. . .But please, please don't worry. In fact, I would get better sooner if you didn't worry."

"How can I not worry? Lewis I love you," the words barely escaped her lips. "I wish you'd told me. How serious is this?"

"They say there's a chance they can use radiation to eliminate it. But I don't know a lot about this. They say it's good I got here when I did," he yawned without meaning to.

"Hey, you're tired," she smiled, and all traces of her anger vanished when she realized it probably was best to just pretend she was ok. Lewis wasn't.

"If you're not happy, don't act like you are," he lied down and gently pushed her down next to him. "I'm so sorry I didn't tell you."

"It's ok," she smiled weakly, kissing him once. He shuddered with the chills beneath his hospital sheets. She smiled at that.

"Get some rest," she told him. He was already half way asleep in her arms.

****Big drama beginning to unfold hereâ€¦|Apologies on the short chap. though. I'm one of those people who smiles and thinks through every word of what someone says about my work. I'd love to get back to you with any questions. Review and let me know what you thought!****

4. Searching

Zane sauntered back to his house, deprived of acceptance from Rikki and instead, forced to face the rejection with only himself and a dozen leftover grease stained fast food boxes lying around.

He slammed himself down on the couch that sprung him onto his back. He chucked his phone at the dry-wall and heard the deafening crack before he had time to regret his moves. There was soon an ugly hole in the wall and a shattered iphone4S on the floor.

Why doesn't she like me! He yelled internally at himself. Was it the fact that he still lived with his Dad? Sure it'd only been a few months - besides, Zane wanted to stick around before he left for a

university. But he felt the whole education thing was a little overrated. So it couldn't have been that logic keeping Rikki away. He had money - what was there to work for anyways? His own personal satisfaction? Please, he had enough of that as it was. He had money, which made him 'better'. That's how it went, wasn't it?

He knew the answer before he counterattacked himself though. The answer that only now, after years with her did he realize. She couldn't have, doesn't she? Rikki hated him because of his money. The fact that he was an arrogant jerk to everyone around him and did a double take at every slut that gave him a flirty eye. And he felt all so on top with his large inheritance of money. His allowance was more than an average person made in month. He was entitled to it all, and his father had given up on withholding the large sums now that Zane was an adult. They couldn't possibly spend as much as they had in either of their lifetimes, anyways.

So Rikki. Rikki, Rikki, Rikki. That's all he thought about, all he cared about. That's all he was anymore. His pathetic wasted life revolved around this T.V. and his own self sorrow, like he was drowning in a pool of his own guilt.

He was useless. And he didn't care anymore. He would do anything in the world to get her back. Anything. And that had to mean something, didn't it?

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Cleo woke up with a start, her clothes disheveled, on the wrong portions of her body and her jewelry twisted around the wrong way. Her mascara had run and her hair was an ugly rat's nest, which didn't explain why Lewis's hand were intertwined in it, braiding it and unbraiding it. She sat there for a while, enjoying the sensation of hands in her hair.

Had she slept all night in the hospital? The bright morning light was streaming through the windows. The beams danced around the room as the bright green leaves fluttered in the morning wind.

Cleo nestled herself into Lewis's chest and turned her gaze to his eyes. "I'm a mess," she stated, trying to lighten the mood.

"No, you're perfect," he laughed, throwing her hair back over her shoulders and watching it cascade across her back. "I love you."

"I love you too," she smiled and pecked him on the lips. Cleo sat up to stretch, walking into the small bathroom that accompanied the hospital room. She fixed everything she could and carried her shoes with her as they'd given her blisters. Well, she could give them to Kim to do the lousy dishes. It was a win-win situation.

"Lewis?" She asked quietly, walking back into the room. "What time is it?"

He checked the little clock on his nightstand. "Eight fifteen. Why, do you need to be somewhere?" he questioned her frazzled expression.

"No, it's nothing I'll do it later," she whipped out her phone to text Rikki that their plans were canceled for the mall at 10:00. The

drive home was at least half an hour, and she needed to get ready, and run to the bankâ€¦ No. It'd be better to stay with Lewis.

"Cleo," he sighed, standing up a little wobbly - but the burden was eased as she steadied him in her arms. "It's not that I don't want you here. I really do. But first of all, I hate having you see me like this. And second of all, there's really nothing for you to do here, it's pretty boring. They've got to run some scans and have me do a physical. They say I can't go home forâ€¦" he voice faltered. "A while. And I don't want you to give up any plans you've got for me. Really," he ensured her with a kiss.

"Butâ€¦"

"But nothing," he sat on the bed and began to breathe easier. He pulled her down on his lap and moved her legs around his waist as she giggled, kissing him for the moment being and forgetting they were in a public place - let alone a hospital. He managed to lighten the mood and distract Cleo from the reality of everything, like he'd always done. When in the real reality, things just might _not_ be ok.

He turned her over as she laughed and resisted to tease him, running a hand down his chest and stealing kisses here and there.

As perfectly timed as things could be, there was a knock on the door and the sound of a key entering a lock as a nurse with straight, long black hair and very beautiful features walked in, _while_ she asked if she could come in or not.

Lewis awkwardly climbed off Cleo and got under his covers, as she straightened herself off and turned to whisper to Lewis. "You _sure_ it's ok f I go. I want to know what's wrong. . .I don't want to leave you."

"Cleo, I'll be here when you get back, I promise."

"Can I stop in this afternoon?" Cleo asked both the nurse and Lewis where she got two different forms of yes.

Lewis looked slightly relieved as Cleo waved from the door. It took all Lewis had not to chase after her and tell her to stay, tell her everything would be alright with him. He couldn't stand the idea of himself disappearing and some hotshot maniac taking his place. If there was one thing he was fighting for, it was Cleo.

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Rikki pursed her lips at the sink in her kitchen. Inside it sat three ice cubes, all of which she'd gently placed in it. Subtly she held out her hand and melted them just enough so that each formed the rough shape of a circle. Something easy. She needed to issue control, not only with her powers but with Zane. Anything to get her mind off Zane - this was supposed to be helping.

Suddenly her phone rang with the recognizable ring-tone she had saved as Cleo. Rikki had yet to inform her of her encounter with Zane, or anything he said. . . Or Zane.

She clenched her fist in frustration as the pipe burst beneath the

kitchen sink, steam evaporating from the crack inside of it and producing a loud whistling noise.

Terry, Rikki's father, emerged to the scene as quickly as he could. "Rikki, what's going on?"

"I um, drained some hot water," she rushed her words and ran out the house in her skimpy shorts and red tank. The black converse really stepped it up a notch. She flipped open her phone on the last ring quickly enough to catch Cleo with a "Hello?"

"Hey Rikki! Are you alright?"

"Yeah yeah I'm great. We still shopping at like ten?" she checked her watch. Nine o'clock.

"Yes. And I have the worst possible new for you," Cleo sounded stressed. But Lewis had told her not to worry - and quite honestly, she didn't want to have to.

"Same here!" Rikki echoed her tone. "I'll swing by your house in fifteen, ok?"

"Ok." Cleo answered.

"What's your news by the way?" Rikki wondered aloud.

"You first."

"No, you," Rikki urged. She wanted to put off the topic of Zane for as long as she could possibly manage.

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Speaking of the devil. In a very fitting V-neck gray t-shirt - one of his many - he sat by the fountain with his face in his hands. Nine O'clock. A very gaudily dressed group of girls whistled at him from the other side of the outdoor outlet mall. The same one he and Rikki once shopped at.

He looked up to them and gave a half smiled before turning to his left to find Miriam running up to him. The last thing he wanted to do right now was upset his Dad - considering he wasn't doing much in his life to impress him at the moment anyways. He relied on those drunken large pizza consumptions to ease his guilt.

"Zaney!" She squealed, kissing him on the cheek. He cringed without her noticing. "Omg, we've been all over the world. Missed you babe! I got the _cutest_ piercing, look at it. Look at it!" She lifted up her shirt allowing him to stare absentmindedly at the belly button ring.

"I was traveling with my dad when I ran into this girl who had the same pair of ONE OF A KIND shoes at me, so what do I do, I call my salesman, Randy, right, so he's all like, 'no, I promise they're one of a kind' but I'm staring at this girl - who was a total slut, doesn't even take the time to straighten her hair - but anyways, they're _obviously_ the same pair as mine and even worse, I have them _on_! Can you believe that! These were meant to be expensive _one of a kind!_ So I'm yelling at Randy like what-"

Miriam must've droned on for ten minutes before Zane stood up and stretched, nearly ignoring her now. He couldn't stand her whatsoever, but he didn't want her getting upset, then his father would cut him off and Zane would be a very unhappy boy.

"So I storm up to this bitch like what the hell, mine are original, who sold you these, was it Randy? So it turns out they were knock offs and that got me even more upset because I mean, I know my shoes are amazing but why would you want to make more if they're from the one of a-

"Miriam?" He shushed her. "I have to buy a new phone. Mine um, broke."

"Ok, sure," she grabbed the loop of his jeans at his left hip. "Come with me I know the perfect place," she led him a few stores down.

Zane, with all his might, still ended up gagging. Just a little. He guessed he had this coming for him, regardless of what he could've set or done. This was his living hell.

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Rikki and Cleo were immersed in conversation in Cleo's bedroom while she got ready and re-did her hair. They'd already talked over both Lewis and Zane immensely, while they were each sympathetic to one another.

Suddenly Rikki laughed. "Bella is so lucky with Will," she smiled.

"Besides boyfriends and exes. Sorry."

"None taken."

"We've got bigger problems! My hair! Look at this! Look at it!"

"What about it?" Rikki grinned and hopped off her cross legged position on Cleo's bed to assist her gaze in the mirror.

Cleo crouched and dug through the cabinet beneath the sink.

"Have enough hair stuff, jeez!" Rikki teased.

"Enough stuff? I have nothing. Ok, well this. But it's nearly empty. And this one no, this one doesn't work. And the rest have too high of a water content. I have nada!"

"Ok, then maybe we should look for something?"

Cleo suggested a hair place in the mall and led Rikki to it, talking the whole way, mainly about Zane but keeping her voice down. Rikki hinted at Lewis enough times to give Cleo the clue that Rikki really wasn't up for this kind of a conversation.

"Hey, did you tell Bella about this?"

"No," Rikki frowned. "Where's she gotten off to anyways?"

"Will," they said and asked in harmony, laughing.

"Go figure," Rikki smiled as Cleo pulled her now brushed but 'unmanageable' hair into a tight pony tail. They entered the far end of the outdoor mall complex side by side as they droned on about hair and boys and one thing that made them unique - the fact that they were mermaids.

"I've been working on this one thingâ€¦" Rikki informed her.

"Yeah, what's that?"

"By taking ice cubes I can melt the outer layer, and then it, well it forms shapes. I tried a circle this morning. It was my first try, but it worked pretty well," he tone was light and airy. A signature Rikki voice.

"Well, hey good for you. You know the statue we got you for your birthday?"

"I know the one," she grinned.

"I formed it, Bella cured it. So maybe you should ask her to- Oh, here it is." Cleo had to drag Rikki into the hair products a little, but she budged.

Cleo strode on in while Rikki stayed back, poking at every sample and sniffing each and every perfume - which to her, smelled more like bug spray than like flowers.

"So which product would work for like a leave in shampoo, _waterless_, " she empathized.

The male clerk - particularly good looking, if Cleo did say so herself - showed her a wide range of Tresemmé products that he thought would be to her liking.

"Thanks!" She spent a long while reading over the ingredient content before she found one that she'd 'think about', and added it to her basket.

Rikki made a sad attempt at spraying on the leave in conditioner, boredom taking it's toll, and Cleo was forced to witness the entire event, aching to intervene the hair care tragedy.

"Rikki," she sighed, laughing slightly. Rikki shoved the sample bottle into the arms of Cleo, frowning.

"Hey, lighten up," Cleo smiled from behind the pale glass window of the little shop they inhabited. A perfect tiny boutique, just next to the ice cream stall and the red benches - Cleo had practically forced Rikki to come back at home, but she agreed to get her mind off Zane. Still, the sound of Hair-and-Nail-Care didn't sit well in her stomach.

Cleo shuffled to Rikki's side, confused at what she was mesmerized at beyond the front of the store. "Rikki?" Cleo asked, following her gaze.

Just across the tiny street was a crowd of people - two of which were holding hands and laughing. More so, the trampy blonde called Miriam was laughing, while the brunette boy just watched with a sarcastic, almost disgusted smile.

Cleo sighed. "Hey," she nudged Rikki.

Rikki snapped back to the present. "What? Oh, sorry," she set down the bottle. "Kind of expensive, really. I've never owned this kind before," she shrugged sheepishly.

"It's not that," Cleo sat down, lightly switching the side of the pony of her long mahogany hair.

Rikki looked up from the tiled floor, feigning interest. "Huh?"

Cleo smiled at the pathetic display of fake enthusiasm Rikki had for her, but there was a sincere light in her eyes that proved at least something was there. Rikki was her best friend - she didn't deserve to be heartbroken over a guy as obnoxious as Zane.

"If you wanted Zane back, you could have him," Cleo sat Rikki down next to her on the window seat cushion.

Rikki quickly objected, eyes widening and cheeks blushing. "Let's go," Rikki ushered Cleo to the door, backing up through the frame. Cleo quickly understood why, noticing Zane and Miriam heading in their direction. Rikki's eyes widened and she bit her lip to keep from swearing as she backed through the door. A boy wearing a sweet smelling cologne collided with her at the entrance.

The event happened in slow motion, Rikki's back colliding with his chest and his neck that reeked of cologne and laundry detergent. Zane instinctively put his arms around her, catching her before she could fall. He swore to her always, he would. But apparently that was a promise that'd been broken.

Cleo stood motionless across the room, having ignored Rikki's attempt to flee as she paid for some nail polish along with three bottles of this and that that were on sale - not noticing the particular duo at the door.

Miriam pushed through the two of them and crossed her arms across her chest. She gave Rikki a disapproving up and down look that suggested her disgust, which was witnessed by both Rikki and Zane.

Rikki weaseled her way out of Zane's arms - not admitting the regret in her stance that she would never show. "Miriam," Zane rolled his eyes, then apologized quietly to Rikki for bumping into her.

Miriam for one, couldn't take it. "You flirt!" She pulled Zane aside. "How can you _stand _her? She's just soâ€¦!"

"Forget her," Zane suggested, causing Rikki to wince. She wondered why he would _ever_ defend Miriam, and put _herself _into the dust. Maybe he really wasn't worth it.

When Miriam wandered over to a boxed in part of the store, Zane turned to Rikki, who was standing alone. "Rikki I'm sorry about last

night. And I just said that because I don't want her upset or-

"You have too many excuses. And also - that's the thing! Completely disusing me for the sake of someone you don't even_ like_? And also _stalking_ me? How pathetic can you get Zane?"

"Look," he took her hands, which she yanked away immediately. "Fine." He sighed, but continued. "I'm pretty sure this is my Dad's test to see if I'm capable of like, living up to what he wants or something. So as long as Miriam is happy, it's all good."

"Oh, so _Daddy's _involved, is he? Basically using her for money, isn't that right? How _selfish_ can you get?"

"It's not like that. Look, after I lost the cafÃ©, everything's been very, well steady. And it's not somewhere I'd really like to be. It's steadily. . .stalling . . .well, I want to move on with my life. I want things to change, to get better! With money, and with you. Rikki, please-"

"Whatever it is, no. This is the last straw. I'm tired of these games being played."

Cleo wandered over awkwardly, when suddenly her phone rang. She checked the caller I.D. and answered immediately, shooting Rikki an apologetic look. Suddenly Cleo ran out of the store gasping to the person on the other end and leaving without a goodbye to Rikki.

"Great," Rikki said silently. "I'll catch a cab later then," she mumbled.

Zane just stared at her. "Look I'd give you a ride home, but. . ."

Right on cue, Miriam walked up, attempting to kiss his cheek, even when he arched away as pleasantly as he could manage. "Zane, they sell piercings!"

"Let me guess, you sat on a stapler and need cute little heart to stab into the hole to cover it up, isn't that right?"

Miriam smiled sarcastically. "Rikki, right? I barely remember you."

"That's funny, I remember a lot of stuff about youâ€¦like when you snuck into the Juicenet's cool-room and almost-"

"You promised you wouldn't tell," she hissed.

"Oops," Rikki said unenthusiastically.

"Girls, please."

"Zane, don't defend her!" Miriam whined.

Zane took in a deep breath and just let everything out on her. "You know _what_, Miriam, I _will_ defend Rikki. _Rikki, yes_, the same Rikki I dated for three years, the same Rikki that you don't seem to _remember_!"

"But you said you were over her. Besides, you're with me now Zaney," she informed him.

"No!" He bellowed.

Rikki had never seen Zane yell like that before.

She started to back out the door with a hurt puppy dog expression on her face. "Why _her_?"

Zane was about to yell some more before Rikki put a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

She cried out a couple swears before turning to text everyone single one of her ten thousand loyal followers all about the 'big breakup'.

Zane turned to Rikki, a guilty expression ringing in his features. "Sorry," he managed.

Rikki just had a smiling awed expression on her face. "Sorry for _what_? That was kind of awesome," she grinned at him. "Not to give you props or anything."

"Seriously?" He asked, confused.

"Yeah," she bobbed her head up and down before pushing open the glass door and turning the corner.

"Wait Rikki, where are you going?"

"Home," she informed him politely.

"Aren't you sure you don't want to shop for _shoes_," he mimicked Miriam's voice. "Or clothes? I mean come on, how old is this thing," he played with the bottom hem of Rikki's shirt.

She scoffed with a smile. "Excuse me? _This_ shirt, you my good sir happen to wear every other day," she poked the middle of his chest.

He caught her hand in a gentle grip and simultaneously wound his arm around her waist.

Suddenly everything to Rikki flashed before her eyes. She was getting so caught up in Zane that she hadn't even realized what she was doing. She was making herself vulnerable to the rich, money seeking snob that broke her heart over and over again. But why? Maybe she owed him two cents of conversation for dissing the blonde tramp for her like that. But that was where it ended, wasn't it?

Rikki suddenly pulled herself out of Zane's grasp and began walking to the street between a clothing shop and a food store.

"Where are you going?"

"My house," she called back like it was obvious.

"Rikki, please. Let me buy you lunch?"

"That's alright," She continued walking, holding out her hand to attract a taxi, until it drove by with her attempts unsuccessful. She needed to get away. And think. Zane had this magical ability to cloud up her mind and make her think like she used to. . .like the Zane she'd once had real feelings for was somewhere underneath.

"At least let me drive you home?" He urged. And with an empty mind and wallet, she didn't resist.

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Rikki hopped in the front seat after a very gentlemanly Zane opened the sleek black door for her. "Thanks," she said awkwardly. She should've just walked.

Ten minutes into their drive Rikki got a call from Cleo, who was crying and apologizing at the same time. "No it's fine!" Rikki assured her.

"I'll pay for the taxi, I'll do whatever you want I'm so sorry!" Cleo's voice stood out from the beeping machines in the background.

"No, really. Um, Zane is driving me home."

"Did you two -"

"No."

Cleo continued to inform Rikki on the mishaps in the hospital while Zane tried to act lost for two reasons - more time with Rikki, and let's face it, he'd been called a stalker in the past and he didn't like it at all. Better to act lost and ask for directions to hear Rikki's voice again.

"Ok, tell Lewis I'm sorry, I'll stop over tonight ok?"

After another minute Rikki tucked away her phone.

"What's up with Lewis?" Zane asked her, subtly driving twenty five in a thirty five, on the long route to her house.

"Nothing."

"Then why did Cleo run out like that? Was Lewis on the phone? Where are you going tonight? Seriously, please you can trust me."

"No I can't."

"Rikkiâ€¦"

"Zane. Can you stop at this gas station up here? My dad needs bread and milk. . ."

"Sure," he answered, a little agitated she would tell him about Lewis.

"Only if you tell me about Lewis."

"Can I trust you?" She asked him seriously as he pulled into a spot and parked.

He looked to her, the slightest hinting of pain in his eye. "Of course you can."

"Nevermind, it's nothing," she lied.

"Rikki!" He caught her arm. "Look, ok. I don't know why you won't pay me any attention, but I wish it would stop! I've kept your secret, I've been loyal to you."

"Miriam?" She raised her eyebrows at the obvious example.
"Sophie?"

"Ok, wellâ€¦you were with Will."

"Enough with the Will! I have never liked Will in that way, ever. I only hung out with him because he understands me Zane. He gets why we need to be cautious on a full moon and what I need to worry about. Frankly, you only pretend to worry about me to make me happy. So that I wouldn't leave you. Everything is always about you. Your selfish. And all of this 'you trying to chase after me' stuff needs to end."

Zane just looked into her eyes with a hurt expression. "I. .
."

Rikki shook her head to try and clear it with little luck. Ducking out of his car and turning to him with cloudy vision. "I'll get my own ride home."

Hurrying inside, she gathered her Dad's necessities and ran up to the counter, entirely distracted while placing her items on the counter. "Your total's \$8.63 the man yawned.

She dug out a twenty and slid it to him.

"Aw miss, I'm really sorry. Our change doesn't seem to be flowing correctly. I don't have the key to the machine. . .you could wait the hour for my boss to get back or maybe round up. Do you want to donate to this charity," he showed her a sign "Or buy the supreme ticket for the Continental Lottery?" He suggested.

"Sure sure whatever," she stared into space absentmindedly.

He handed her the ticket and she stared some more. She kind of meant she wanted to donate, but whatever, she knew arguing would make her cry, and this innocent ignorant gas station worker obviously didn't care nor would help. She shoved the thing in her purse and ran out the door, needing to hurry out to the highway and wait on a bench for a taxi.

Not paying attention, Zane bumped into her with force and the contents of her purse spilled all over the sidewalk and pavement, the bread and milk crashing to ground. Suddenly a barely audible tearing of plastic ripped through the air, but the sound was heard after the cheap plastic milk jug exploded all over her sandals, drenching her skin in the liquid. "Nice!" She criticized him shrilly, panicking.

She knew there was only one place she could run, and only one undesirable person she could turn to. "Zane!"

His eyes whipped to her feet and back to her gaze, where a tear escaped the deep blue ocean, nestled in a sea of white. Was she crying over him? Zane had never in his life seen Rikki cry. He'd be honest, he cried out of anger and frustration sometimes, but no, not her. She just ran. She ran from troubles, anything and everything that made her sad or angry. She always had to get away, or needed to be somewhere. But Zane saw right through that charade.

He wrapped his warm arm around her waist and led her quickly to the back door of the car - all the while Rikki received tingly chills (not knowing why, let's face it, she dumped him). Zane got a secure grip on the handle, whipped the thing open, and assisted her quickly, laying her down. But it was too late. The change occurred as Zane witness the whole event. There was no time to think.

In a split second, acting on impulse decision he climbed in the back with her and slammed the car door as the force of the change heaved him onto her. Rikki's eyes grew wide as Zane's head barreled onto her shoulder. Her tail was cramped up in the four seated sleek sports car - not enough room for the extra feet of her tail, and as she adjusted, they collided.

Zane screamed out in pain, then toppled into the area designated for the rider's feet.

Rikki scrambled to look but couldn't move with the weight of her tail forcing her in position. Even more worrisome, she saw the cashier flipping around his keys on the way out the door - and the only other car in the lot just two doors down. Of all the sports cars without tinted windows - Zane's had to be one of them. And her purse was outside the car.

She heard Zane moan and struggle with his maneuver to get up, breathing a sigh of relief that he was alright. But she rushed her motions - she held up her hand and steamed her tail, instantly regretting it as the windows fogged up and the air became hot and moist.

Zane started gasping for air as his cheeks flushed without enough oxygen to the system.

A rapping on the window upset Rikki more than anything in the world - the car was unlocked.

Just as soon as it appeared though, the tail vanished.

"Excuse me," the man called obnoxiously. "This isn't authorized to be happening here. On the property. . .excuse me! Your having unauthorized relations in the parking lot, mister and miss!"

Whether it was the lack of air or the pressure of the day, Rikki and Zane just turned to each other in sync, and as if planned started full out laughing, and continued on until they were both hysteric.

Rikki helped Zane out of the car on the opposite side the man stood

and watched as the hot air vanished into the sky. Zane had a thick layer of humid sweat on his forehead while Rikki remained virtually as normal as she was before, only in the heated environment with legs for a moment.

Rikki gave Zane a sympathetic look over before she laughed again, brushing the wet bangs out off his brow quickly, heading around the car to gather her belongings.

The man just stood there awkwardly, gaping at Zane and then at Rikki - untouched.

"Excuse me," she ignored his words as she ushered him to what should've been his car.

"Thanks for your service, really."

"Ye-es ma'am," he stuttered, cranking the old rusted vehicle to life before driving away with a shaking head.

Zane came up behind miss goldilocks and pressed his torso against her.

"Ah!" She shuddered as the sweat from his shirt sunk into hers. "That's disgusting," she pushed him off, still a noticeable trace of a smile on her features.

Any chance Zane would get to hug Rikki - he'd take. "Well I supposed a goodbye hug should be in order," he smirked.

She gathered everything up and organized it as she sat on the curb, placing one item after another into her purse. "Your leaving me for good?" She asked enthusiastically.

He rolled his eyes. "I just assumed a goodbye hug should be in order since we've officially slept together."

Her head snapped to him. "What?"

He wagged his eyebrows and she finally got the joke, feeling a little awkward.

Zane searched for anything to change the subject. "What's that? A lottery ticket?â€|I didn't know you played."

"I don't," she yawned. "It's a long story, and I'm kind of tired."

"Ok, sure," Zane sighed. "Hop in, let's go. "

"No. . .that's ok," she dismissed him again. "Thanks for bringing me here, but. . ."

"Rikki." He said suddenly serious, it was almost frightening to her. "You can't keep running from everything. You keep everything bottled up inside. . ."

"Well I've made it pretty clear how I feel about you," she sneered, angry with him again.

"Look, ok! We were getting along great two seconds ago. Why can't you just admit you still like me?" He yelled with a touch of sincerity.

"Ok," she shrugged. "I do." She watched the play of every emotion on his face before she continued.

"But I don't want you messing with my head anymore Zane. I think you've done enough for one day. Thanks for not leaving on the sidewalk to be exposed to everyone, really," she mumbled as she started to walk away.

"Rikki!" He called, but it was too late. She vanished down the road that led her away from town and sighed at the meeting that never should've occurred. She did the right thing at least, not telling him about Lewis. She thought she couldn't trust him, but he'd saved her from exposure, hadn't he?

Their relationship was complicated enough. Rikki had admitted she left him because of the way she treated her - and the way he didn't, always ignoring her for Sophie and the sponsorship and the business. So that was that. He could have all the money in the world, but he _couldn't_ have her. She might falter, who cared? She could tell Zane anything, tell him she still felt for him, but it did nothing. Nothing would compare to the situation unfolding, while both participants in the duet stood oblivious to the situation before them. The fact that something much bigger than their current relationship troubles was soon to unfold - something fate had coming for them. Something sitting on the tables, on the brink of twisting and turning, and changing their lives forever.

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Hope you liked it! Predictions, critique€|where are Rikki and Zane to turn€|and what's the devastating news that's been burdened on Lewis now? Tell me what you think, your word on mine means the world.

5. Anticipation

I'm known for never updating when I should! (Not soon enough). Sorry about that, sincerely! School is letting up for about a week and I figured I should update. Tell me what you think, it always means everything. Another chapter soon.

Why this particular woman would pursue a career in nursing, Cleo had no idea. She was blonde and busty and a bit of a klutz - she fumbled with a shining silver needle that gleamed under the fluorescents. Walls of X-Ray scans lingered on the projector even after their originals had been removed. The entire room seem to glow with an eerie color that neither Lewis or Cleo could put their finger on.

Smiling, the woman placed a prestigious brand of medicine on the table and undid the strongly sealed sticker with her glittery red nails. In her other hand rested the hospital's required ingredient label that the medicine, as she explained, tended to lack due to faulty production conditions. Some worker somewhere just didn't like peeling and pressing stickers.

Cleo zoned in and out. She kept looking back to Lewis, who watched the woman with a strange expression. Every time he felt Cleo's gaze slip away, he carefully studied the contours of her face, which to him was the most beautiful thing in the world. But beside that, he was wondering the same thing she was - why was this woman here. Of all the luck in the world, this is what he received.

Strange though, as she opened her mouth, intelligence poured out. The closer each of them look, the more evident it became. She had gorgeous tan skin and bulging muscles, but something was off. Somethingâ€¦|

"I'll be replacing your previous nurse. I'm Lilac," she gushed heartfelt joy, sticking the needle into Lewis and counting to ten as he bit his tongue in secret.

Cleo ran her eyes over her boyfriend's face, absorbing the fear in the atmosphere. Beside all the awkward people they had been encountering today, a deep sense of heartache lingered inside each of them. Cleo wanted specifics. She wanted to know the truth.

After the nurse meandered out into the hall, Cleo rested on the edge of the cot. Lewis intertwined their fingers, something that made her heart flutter with emotion. She would never let him escape her grip.

"Lewisâ€¦|" Her voice was empty.

"Don't," he instructed. He didn't want their relationship crumbling because of this.

At the moment, everything about his presence screamed attraction. His shoulders pointed in her direction and his position on the bed was uncomfortable and painful, just to appear a little less vulnerable. He needed to be the strong one of the relationship - it was an underling desire that he was hesitant to admit. She was always off battling the mysterious 'magical' forces, and he was what? A college boy? Cleo was and would always be the best thing in his life - that couldn't all just slip away because of the stress all this worrying provided.

His eyes were focused on hers, a deep ocean of chocolate brown. Leaning in, her intoxicatingly melodious scent filled his mind. He squirmed a little, wanting only to be locked up somewhere with their heated breath trapped in the close proximity. Lewis's mind raced and his heart began to, as he ran his fingers through her flawless hair and pulled her face close to his.

Cleo smiled a little, glancing subtly to the door in a flirtatious matter.

She pecked him on the lips, teasing him, when in reality all she craved was him all over her. Their fantasies danced together as she lied down next to him, both rolling onto their sides.

Lewis kissed her sweetly, once, then twice, and again and again until her cheeks flushed and his hand lingered on her hip. She daringly hooked her leg around his torso as his eyes fluttered open.

If Lewis was anything, he was a gentleman, gently sliding her leg back onto the bed. Their eyes locked and she understood what he was getting at.

The couple laid there like that for a moment in a pounding silence, Cleo's head on his chest and her hand on his stomach. They'd gone further before, but not by much. They were either in Cleo's bedroom or somewhere semi-public, and neither one of them particularly wanted to be carded for PDA.

Sex was an awkward subject for both of them. They'd known each other their entire lives, they were in love, and neither could resist one another. Yet, Lewis, as much as he wanted it, would never let it happen between them. And Cleo, as much as she craved that racing emotion and rush of adrenaline, valued her family too much to let anything like this happen. She knew someday it would happen, but after their hormones settled down and they could get married and would be prepared for the consequences. Now she feared it never would. She'd live her whole life in regret that she couldn't express her love like that. Forever was a tentative word now.

"Have you been working out?" she poked his stomach, straining for another topic of conversation.

He laughed quietly. "A little bit."

He played with her hands. "You got your nails done?"

"Bella did them."

"Pretty," he mused.

He rolled slightly and ran his hands through her hair. "You know you're beautiful don't you?"

"Stop," she smiled.

"Haven't I told you?"

"Oh, once or twice," she echoed the words she spoke when he flirted with her.

"You know you're perfect too don't you?"

Lewis grinned. "I try."

She bent down and kissed him again, this time winding her hands in his hair as he held her waist tight.

"Lewis," she giggled, her voice sending goosebumps down his spine.

Her shivers mimicked his as his hand lightly danced up and down her back. Though, she knew Lewis would never try anything with her. And she was too terrified to talk about it. Now didn't seem appropriate, regardless. Her train of thought collided as the path it took lead her to the ultimate conclusion: Lewis might be here forever. In this hospital. This was their last chance.

She might never get another chance like this to talk to him. He

insisted she wouldâ€|but there would never be any other scenario than what unfolded here.

Ignorantly, Lewis kissed her neck gently, pressing her against him.

Cleo raised herself up on the bed, and for a moment she considered climbing on top of him, satisfying both their urges. . . But they needed to talk about this.

"Can we be serious for a second?" She raised herself off the bed, sitting in a chair opposite Lewis.

He sighed, knowing what was coming. "I'm fine."

"We're making out in a hospital bed, Lewis. There's a thousand other places I'd rather be. You're here for a reasonâ€|"

"Humor me. Where would you like to be?"

"Lewis, please. Just _tell _me."

"I will."

Cleo breathed a sigh of relief.

"But I don't want this magic to disappear, just because you know diagnostics andâ€|timeframes."

She took a large breath. _Timeframes. _"Tell me," she met his eyes, and he faltered.

"Okayâ€|" His explanation took him minutes, even after the distractions didn't work. "It's cancerous. In fact, it _is_ cancer. It's a tumor, in here," he pointed to his head. "And it's dangerous. That much you already know. It won't grow too fastâ€|it's a subdued form. I studied the results in fact, and there's not much anybody can do about it."

"Nothing?" She squeaked. She knew nothing about the topic, but wanted to.

"If they use radiation, my brain will hibernate in a state of mental retardation."

"Wait. . . why?" She tried to understand.

"It'll kill off all the good cells too. Radiation is supposed to kill the bad cells, but can't pinpoint the tumor, so many good cells are usually killed. That's usually what happens. I'll never gain back any of that knowledge, because brain cells aren't replaceable. And there's a good chance I'd be paralyzed for the rest of my life, because of the way it interferes with my coordination, it also affects my nervous system. Andâ€| They can't control the radiation, otherwise they'd try to use it."

Cleo was trying to quell the shudders, and the tears.

"Come here," he reached his arm out to her, in the place she sat across the room. That chair couldn't be comfortable.

She shook her head, glaring at the floor.

"Cleo, please," he was distraught, and just as horrified as she was. Not at the disease, but mainly at her reaction. He hadn't wanted to tell her—and this was why.

"I have a _very_ long time to live!"

"It's deadly?" She shrieked as the tears drifted over onto her skin.

"It's _serious_, and potentially—"

"Lewis—no—"

"Come on, come here," he begged. He unhooked the IV needle from his wrist and shakily stood up, trying to place his feet in the right direction.

Cleo jumped up, more so weakened than he was. She hustled over and put a hand on each side of his shoulders.

"Stop!" She commanded. "I can't see you like this. Just, please stay here. I have to go. Please," she whirled around, but a hand caught her wrist.

"Cleo! I love you, ok?" He hadn't told her that in a long time. "I have to make this better. You're upset, and it's my fault!"

Her hands were practically vibrating, as she sat him down. She glanced away as he placed the needle back in his arm, then walked around the bed and snuggled into his side.

"You didn't do anything wrong. Cleo, you're not blaming yourself are you?" He knew her all too well. When she was stunned that he guessed it, he continued. "Look, why don't we make the best of what time we have left." His nails trailed up and down her arm.

She was silent again.

"C'mon," he tilted her chin up.

"I love you too," she responded, kissing him softly.

He smiled genuinely, missing hearing those words more than anything. His mind replayed his childhood where all he thought about was her. . nothing had changed really. He wondered if she felt the same way, for so long. He shouldn't have admitted this, especially to himself, but her tears brought him a spark of joy.

No, he wasn't a pessimistic person normally, but her sorrow proved to him just how much she didn't want him to leave. And that would be all he would ever ask for. Cleo wanting him in return. And if it was that in exchange for a disease, then he would take it.

But that was selfish. He'd rather live on than see her hurt, or rather have her hurt without him.

Even after she crawled out of his arms and into the hallway with some

excuse like 'I don't want you to see me like this,' her burning hurt echoed in his mind. For once he was sure, she wouldn't leave. But the scary question was: Would he?

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Zane had picked the pieces of his heart up the day before and slammed them back into his chest as he watched Rikki run away again.

Was it him, the way he acted? He couldn't put a finger on it he couldn't figure it out.

Beside the ache in his chest, he was more worried about his ears - had he heard her right? Rikki Chadwick, the name on his phone to which the thousands of texts he never sent was addressed, the face in his mind in which images he concocted played out day after day after day, the girl that he never stopped thinking about. . . She just admitted she liked him? As in yes, I've almost talked to you too, I think about you all the time as well.

If they were stuck on each other, then why wouldn't Rikki give Zane the time of day? He sat in the parking lot for a good ten minutes, knowing that catching up to her and offering another ride would just tick her off, God forbid. That's the last thing he wanted, Rikki angry at him for some reason or another. He sunk into the drivers seat of his sports car, pondering every sentence Rikki had ever said to him, looking for some reason as to why she wouldn't just give in and be with him.

Sure, that was just Rikki. She was stubborn, unwilling, and a mess half the time. But those things just made her her. She would never give up her dignity by forgiving Zane, at least not easily, that was for sure. But could she at least speak to him?

It was Miriam, that was it, he decided. But he'd already given up on the tramp. She would undoubtedly become some other rich boy's tag along dog and get over Zane in a heartbeat. . .he never felt for her and knew he never would. Rikki should see that.

Zane was never good at expressing his feelings, which is why he could never tell Rikki to stay without sounding selfish. Yet, wanting her to stay was selfish of him. He offered her nothing besides a loaded bank account and a reckless attitude.

"No." He spoke aloud.

They connected. He made her fall for him, and he knew it. She even admitted it! So what was the part of Zane that she couldn't stand what was it about him that was driving her away?

For crying out loud, Zane was broken in front of a closed up gas station in the bad part of town in a shiny car, and he didn't give a damn. He didn't care about his car, and in fact, he didn't care about ditching Miriam or the fact that his father would cut off his money. He only dated Miriam out of greed. And he'd take Rikki over money any day.

Zane sat up fast and slammed his elbow into the steering wheel by mistake, his heart skipping a beat for the ninth time that day. He supposed their eyes had met eight times then.

It was an epiphany. Rikki hated when Zane was greedy. Maybe she did know that Zane was only using Miriam for money, and quite possibly she understood. But she didn't like it. In fact, she hated it when Zane chose a money making opportunity over her. Zane had always promised that the money was for Rikki, to buy her gifts and shower her with things, but she denied them every chance she got. Rikki was plainly against Zane when he valued material items over her, even though he meant well. Zane knew what he was doing wrong now.

Back before the caf  closed, he would always work late instead of taking a walk with her on the beach. He promised the next day they would do something, needing money for gas for his boat and some cash for dinner. He thought he was spoiling her with things, when in reality, she saw it as him buying her love. And she didn't want to be bought.

He pressed his fingers into his temples, watching Rikki and him drive up to the gas station in his mind. Only this time they kissed. No - she walked inside and bought milk, bread, and one other thing. .some staple. Eggs, maybe. But there was a lottery ticket with everything, which rattled him. He was promising her financial stability, and couldn't understand why she didn't want it. But beside that, then they kissed. No -

Zane shook his head and started the car, driving over the bumpy pavement. He really needed to stop with these childish fantasies.

He felt mildly guilty about taking the long way now, seeing as she'd have to walk the whole distance. But it was too late now. It'd been twenty minutes and she would've made it, walked into her house, put the bread down - she never did buy more milk - and sunken into her couch, replaying every event of the day, just as aggravated at he was.

Or he hoped at least.

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It'd been a month since Zane had moved into his new apartment. Boxes still needed to be unpacked and some appliances needed to be cleaned, but other than that he was on his own. He squinted into the early morning sun and frowned, instinctively shielding his eyes and rolling over.

He was greeted with a sharp pain in his side. His phone.

Curiously, he turned it on. He had a voicemail from Nate and three texts from Miriam nothing out of the ordinary. Disappointedly and half asleep, he designated the 'To' box to Rikki, and began typing before he snapped out of his phase. A little voice in the back of Zane's head told him she was angry - don't tick her off.

He chucked the phone across the apartment bedroom and wandered into the bathroom where he took a good look at himself in the mirror. He'd let his hair grow out like it was when they first started dating, hoping maybe she'd feel that spark again. He'd started working out again, thinking maybe lust would convince her. He had cologne bottles scattered across the counter, hoping maybe he'd find a scent that'd bring her back.

But none of that mattered. She liked him for him, not his money or abundant resources, not his looks or body or smell. And there was only one problem with himself. Himself. That explained why he never figured it out.

Throwing on a pair of dark jeans and a pull over sweatshirt, he grabbed a bottle of water on his way out the door.

After an awkward wait in the elevator with many other morning risers, Zane meandered over to the garage where he kept both of his sports cars. He wanted to take the one with better gas mileage, but figured in case he saw Rikki he should take the one he'd been using. If she happened to see him, she wouldn't jump back to the conclusion of 'spoiled rich kid' again.

Because he wasn't, was he?

He jumped in it as the engine rumbled to life beneath his feet.

He was heading to the gym, sweatpants in a bag in the trunk, but figured he should check up on his dad first.

There he went again, ignorantly snapping back to his old habits.

The man was paying for all expenses - living, travel, and anything else extraordinarily unnecessary. Though it was convenient, and a great way for the twenty year old to live, after his encounter with Rikki and some subconscious thoughts he wanted to pursue a career. Probably in his dad's line of work. Financial records. . .something like that of the café. Maybe he wouldn't even attempt at entrepreneurship for his next job, because that required funds to get started.

He dialed a number on the phone built into his car.

"Hello, Bennett enterprises?" His father phrased a greeting like a question.

"You should know this number."

"Oh, hello Zane," his father picked up on the voice. "Want something?"

"Are you home?"

"I'm just about to leave," Zane could hear Harrison yawn. He heard the drip of the coffee machine in the background and the roar of the dishwasher, probably only cleaning the single cup. The maid doesn't come on Wednesdays.

"Could you wait a moment? I'll be there in ten."

"Zane, no, I've got work to do-"

"Honestly, it's a work proposition. Really, I'll be there soon. Wait up, alright."

His father sighed. He never had time for Zane. Work was always an issue. Never his son's emotions or well being.

Zane took the depressed sigh as a yes and continued on through the mild city traffic. He was on the outskirts of town, the large city behind him and his apartment building resting right with them. He'd leased the place for a hefty price, but what did it matter. His dad needed to pay for being an asshole, both literally and figuratively. Besides, it was a fifteen minute walk from the ocean, a five minute drive. The closer to the mermaid magic the better.

Was it his anger towards his father that Rikki hated?

No, enough about Rikki.

He smiled to himself. _Yeah, right!_

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Zane and Harrison sat around the kitchen table, papers scattered among the wooden cracks.

His father was doing what he did best - business.

"Don't try and scam _me_," Zane rolled his eyes, pushing the papers away.

"Zane, I really don't have time for this. I'm an hour late. What will the board think? My secretary. . .she's new, a brunette, an attractive womanâ€¦"

"_Dad._ Listen, then give me the job right now and this deal can be over with. I want all the benefits though. Medical, dental, healthcare."

"Medical and healthcare are the same thing," he scoffed, all knowingly.

"Please?"

"Don't beg, Zane you're old enough to go find a job yourself," he stood up, clumping the papers together in a lump and shoving them in his briefcase.

"I can't _believe_ you! Can you please give me _one_ thing! As a father to his son. You owe me that much."

"I pay for everything you do Zane. Even after I cut you off you found a way to manipulate me into it."

"_Dad_."

"No!"

"What's this all about, huh? You hire people here and there, with less experience than me. Spots are opening up all the time, and you won't give a position to your own son?"

"You let me down Zane," his knuckles grasped the brass front door knob.

"Oh my God. Is this about Miriam?" Zane stomped after him. "What the

honest hell? That girl-"

"She called me and told me _everything_. I don't want you hanging around Rikki, Zane. She's one of _them_. And you _shouldn't_ be."

"One of who? Oh, you mean the kind that maybe can't afford to pay a maid to clean their house, but instead does it themselves, through hard work and commitment?"

"Zane!" Harrison bellowed. "We are _not_ having this argument. I work hard all day and don't have time to clean this house alone."

"You don't have time for me either. . ."

Harrison stopped trying to get away. "What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Go cry about it to someone else, honestly. What about Rikki? She seems pretty fond of salt water."

"_That_ is over now!" Zane referred to 'the incident'. The mermaid mishap that neither of them ever spoke about.

Zane had the perfect comeback but stopped himself. "Just give me a part time job. Cut off all my money, and if I fail, say I told you so."

The Bennett father liked the sound of that, and running late, he gave in. "Alright Zane. Call my secretary and tell her to file a position. Your money stops tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" He panicked. "I mean. . .ok. Tomorrow."

"See you -"

All of a sudden his pager went off. "Hello, Harrison Bennett?"

His face turned ghostly white, as Zane watched the conversation unfold. His father yelled then turned very quiet. There were many questions, he could tell. But the answer was evident.

When he hung up, he sank to the floor.

Zane knelt at his level.

"Dad? Dad are you alright?"

"Zane," he coughed, boosting himself up slowly with the door. "I'm afraid your funding is going to have to be cut off a little sooner than we expected."

End
file.